Est. 1841 | **YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY**

Degree outcomes statement 2020-21

1. Introduction

1.1 At York St John University we have been changing lives through education for over 185 years. We are proud to reaffirm our ongoing commitment to protect the value of our degrees and to our transparent, consistent and fair approach to academic standards.

1.2 Over 50% of our students come from one or more of the different social groups that are underrepresented in higher education. Our Access and Participation Plan sets out our longstanding commitment to widen access and promote fairness in education. This degree outcomes statement demonstrates our commitment to protecting the value of our students' degrees over time.

2. Our degree classification profile

2.1 Our degree classification profile sets out the percentage of degree classes awarded over the last five years for our undergraduate (level 6) degree programmes. It is provided at the University level because data is otherwise aligned to our internal structures, which is not meaningful to an external audience.

2.2 We have seen an upward trend in first and upper second-class awards (+12.9%) in this period, broadly in line with the sector. This change can be accounted for by improvements in student performance and increased professionalism in our teaching and learning approaches and practices. This is described in section 7, teaching practice and learning resources (below). The increase in 2019-20 (+6%) may also have been affected by measures introduced to ensure students were not disadvantaged by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and by changes in the wider study environment. This is described in section 3, Covid-19 measures in 2019-20 (below).

2.3 We have made significant progress in closing the attainment gaps for students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, for students with disabilities, mature students, and for students from the most deprived areas.

Year of award	Total awards	First Class	Upper Second Class	Lower Second Class	Third Class
2015-16	1,494	15.8%	47.9%	30.0%	6.4%
2016-17	1,510	17.0%	48.5%	28.7%	5.8%
2017-18	1,270	20.6%	47.5%	26.1%	5.8%
2018-19	1,600	21.4%	50.1%	24.5%	4.0%
2019-20	1,729	30.0%	46.6%	21.1%	2.4%

Figure 1: Total awards and degree classifications over time
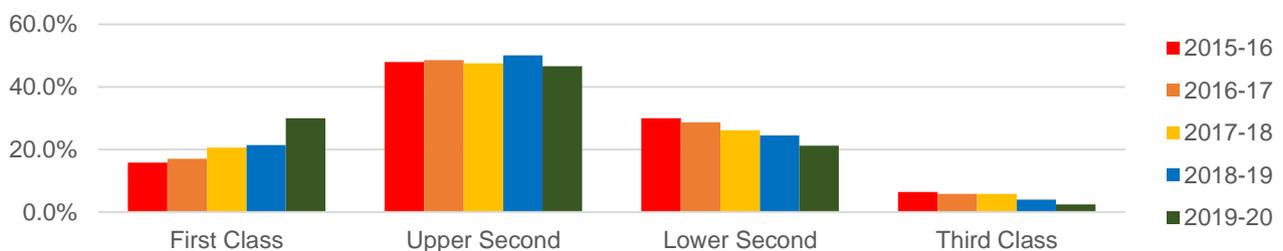

Figure 2: percentage classification of undergraduate (level 6) awards by academic year
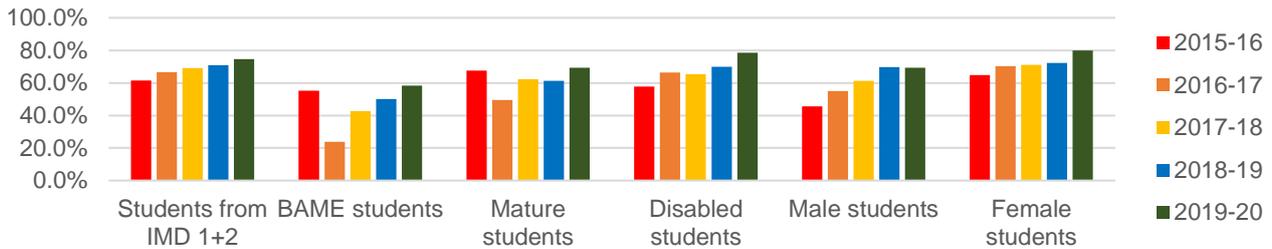
Figure 3: percentage of first and upper second-class degrees awarded to undergraduate (level 6) students by academic year (IMD: Index of Multiple Depravation)

3. Covid-19 in 2019-20

3.1 In March 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic changed the way universities operated. In order to secure students' long-term academic success, the University worked with student representatives to introduce measures to ensure students were not disadvantaged by the pandemic.

3.2 The approach to assessment was changed to take into account the unfamiliar context of teaching and learning taking place at a distance and provide students a fair opportunity to meet the learning outcomes of their programme of study. This included removing elements of assessment where learning outcomes had been met or introducing alternatives to be completed remotely. Increased flexibility in the application of exceptional circumstances and deadlines was introduced.

3.3 The Safety Net Policy 2019-20 guaranteed that students' programme-level average would not be lower than a benchmark calculated from confirmed assessment outcomes prior to March 2019. School Assessment Boards were also able to scale modules for a whole cohort where performance was out of line from that of the previous three years' performance in that module.

3.4 The benchmarks were applied in fewer than a third of student outcomes but the change to alternative assessments helped to continue to close attainment gaps, particularly for disabled students. Any good practice from this approach to assessment has been carried forward.

4. Assessment and marking practices

4.1 The University's learning, teaching and student experience strategy underpins programme design.

4.2 All of our degrees undergo detailed scrutiny through our programme approval process which ensures that assessment criteria and learning outcomes for all programmes are appropriately mapped to sector reference points (subject benchmark statements and the UK framework for higher education qualifications) and professional or regulatory body requirements. Following an internal compliance review all programmes proposals are considered at an external approval event, which provides independent external scrutiny by subject experts.

4.3 Assessment and marking practices used across the University are described in the Code of Practice for Assessment and Academic Related Matters. This includes arrangements for marking and moderation, the application of exceptional circumstances, and the appointment of independent external examiners, and the operation of School Assessment Panels and School Assessment Boards. The progress and award examination panel ensures that assessment procedures are properly conducted, and an independent external examiner for progress and award sits on this panel. This consistent application of procedures and policies ensures the value of the University's qualifications awarded over time is protected.

4.4 Marking criteria are designed to help students know what is expected of them. In the last five years, external examiners in certain disciplines have argued for greater use of the full marking range, particularly the top of the first-class range. In combination with the introduction of generic assessment descriptors, enabling students to see what they need to do to achieve marks within a specified range, the increased use of the full marking scale is likely to have contributed to the increase in award of first-class degrees.

5. Academic governance

5.1 The University's academic governance framework is overseen by [Academic Board and its committees](#). Academic Board safeguards the academic integrity of the University and is the custodian of its degree awarding powers. Academic Board provides the Vice Chancellor and the Governing Body with the assurance on the standards of the University's awards and the University's academic portfolio.

5.2 The oversight of quality and standards is delegated to the Quality and Standards Committee, who are responsible for the University's [Regulations](#) and [Code of Practice for Assessment and Academic Related Matters](#), which describe the operation of the framework, and have been developed and reviewed with reference to the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).

5.3 The effectiveness of learning, teaching and assessment practices within the University and at our [collaborative partners](#) is reviewed through a process of [annual monitoring](#), culminating in the presentation of an annual quality report and action plan to Academic Board and Governing Body. Implementation of the action plan is overseen by [Academic Board](#) and its committees.

5.4 All programmes are subject to a [periodic (subject) review](#) on a six year cycle, which provides an opportunity to reflect on academic practice and student experience, and confirms that programmes continue to meet national expectations on standards. Quality and Standards Committee oversees this process, scrutinising outcomes and sharing best practice across the institution.

6. Classification algorithms

6.1 Our approach to degree classification is described in the [Code of Practice on Assessment and Academic Related Matters](#).

6.2 We recognise that some students do not achieve their full potential performance until their final level of study. Consequently, we award students on Bachelor's degrees the better of two calculations, an approach widely used across the sector. Level 4 marks are excluded from the calculation, level credit-weighted averages are calculated and rounded to the nearest integer, and two award mark calculations are made using different level-weightings:

- equal weighting of the final two levels (levels five and six);
- double weighting of the final level (six) and single weighting of the second level (five).

Students are awarded the better of the two calculations to determine their degree classification. Only credits gained at the University are used in the calculation.

6.3 In November 2020, Quality and Standards Committee reviewed the algorithms used in degree classifications in line with the UKSCQA report on principles of degree algorithm design. It was confident in the use of two algorithms as suitable for the University student population and pedagogy.

6.4 The University introduced a new scheme of compensation for students entering in September 2020. This allows marginal failure in up to 20 credits of modules per level, to be compensated by achievement in other modules in the same level. If a student is eligible to compensate a failed module, the credit is awarded, and only after 120 credits of the level have been attempted.

6.5 The scheme of compensation replaces a scheme of condonement, which allows the award of credit in a single non-compulsory module of 20 credits in each level of study where a student has made a serious attempt (achieved a mark of at least 20, but less than the passing mark of 40). This scheme still applies for students who entered the University before September 2020. Following a review in 2018-19, it was felt that the new scheme of assessment better reflected the balance between poor performance in a single module, and a student's overall achievement in a level of study.

6.6 We allow reassessment attempts, up to a maximum of two, where condonement or compensation will not be applied. Reassessment is capped at the pass mark, but this does not cap the overall module mark.

6.7 If a student's credit-weighted average falls within the borderline range (defined as 0.5 below the threshold average for achievement of the higher classification), the higher classification is awarded if the final-level (six) credit-weighted average is within the range of the higher classification and does not fall within the threshold range.

6.8 There has been no change to the University's classification algorithm or borderline range in the last five years. For students entering in September 2020, the University has removed the borderline consideration in recognition of the compensation already applied to achieve credit within a single module. This will first be applied in 2022-23.

7. Teaching practice and learning resources

7.1 We value, recognise and reward teaching excellence and outperform the sector with 42% of staff holding a teaching qualification (compared with 26% nationally) and 92% with HEA Fellowship (42% nationally). Our commitment to using the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) as a tool for both initial and continuing professional development has underpinned our ambition to provide high quality learning, teaching, assessment and research, and contributed to the development of our degree outcomes.

7.2 Sustained investment in physical and technical learning resources demonstrates our commitment to a high-quality campus, to access to IT and course specific equipment. Spending on library resources has been above the sector average and resulted in increased use by students.

7.3 The development of our approaches to academic tutoring, student attendance, and student engagement have enabled the University to offer pastoral and academic support when students need it the most.

8. Identifying good practice and actions

8.1 Examples of good practice include the University's whole-person approach, where students are supported not just academically, but with student skills, information and digital literacy, and with skills needed for key course-specific technology and for assistive technology. Students tell us that they value this support. Students also develop through initiatives outside the classroom, including students as researchers and opportunities through the much-improved Students' Union.

8.2 Our review of degree outcomes has not identified new actions to be taken forward. Through our annual monitoring and academic governance processes, the following actions have previously been identified and are in progress:

    a. further closing attainment gap for identified underrepresented groups through the objectives set out in the Access and Participation Plan 2020-21 to 2024-25;

    b. monitor the introduction of anonymous marking in 2020-21 to ensure bias does not enter the assessment process and all students are treated equally.

9. Risks and challenges

9.1 As we transition to the assessment compensation scheme, revised degree classification thresholds and borderline consideration, we might anticipate a change in the distribution of degree outcomes for degrees awarded from the 2022-23 academic year. We will seek to mitigate this through continued investment in and development of teaching practice and learning resource.

9.2 In the next decade, the concept of the 21st century University will continue to be reshaped. Whilst we're confident in our assessment processes and practices, we will continue to adapt in the best interests of our students. Throughout, we will continuously monitor degree outcomes and ensure that our processes continue to protect the value of our awards over time.

Version control statement

Document property	Detail
Version:	2 (2020-21)
Document title:	Degree Outcomes Statement
Author role and department:	Registry
Approved date:	11 November 2021
Approved by:	Governing Body
Equality analysis undertaken:	Not yet undertaken